

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq

July 25, 2006

President Bush. Thank you all. Please be seated.

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the White House. I just had a very constructive meeting with the leader of a Government that has been chosen by the Iraqi people in free and fair elections. I appreciate your vision for a free Iraq, and I appreciate you briefing me on a strategy to reduce violence and to rebuild your country.

You have a strong partner in the United States of America, and I'm honored to stand here with you, Mr. Prime Minister. It's a remarkable, historical moment, as far as I'm concerned, to welcome freely elected leader of Iraq to the White House.

We discussed a lot of issues. The Prime Minister has laid out a comprehensive plan. That's what leaders do. They see problems; they address problems; and they lay out a plan to solve the problems. The Prime Minister understands he's got challenges, and he's identified priorities.

Our priority is to help this Government succeed. It's in the national interest of the United States that a unity government, based upon a constitution that is advanced and modern, succeed. And that's what I told the Prime Minister. He comes wondering whether or not we're committed. He hears all kinds of stories here in the United States. And I assured him that this Government stands with the Iraqi people. We're impressed by your courage, Mr. Prime Minister, and we're impressed by the courage of the Iraqi people. And we want to help you.

We talked about security in Baghdad. No question, the terrorists and extremists are brutal. These are people that just kill innocent people to achieve an objective, which is to destabilize his Government. The Prime Minister tells me that he and his Government are not shaken by these ac-

tions. They're concerned about them; they're not shaken by them.

The Iraqi people want to succeed. They want to end this violence. Our strategy is to remain on the offense, including in Baghdad. Under the Prime Minister's leadership, coalition and Iraqi leaders are modifying their operational concept to bring greater security to the Iraqi capital. Coalition and Iraqi forces will secure individual neighborhoods, will ensure the existence of an Iraqi security presence in the neighborhoods, and gradually expand the security presence as Iraqi citizens help them root out those who instigate violence.

This plan will involve embedding more U.S. military police with Iraqi police units to make them more effective. The Prime Minister advised me that to support this plan, he and General Casey have agreed to deploy additional American troops and Iraqi security personnel in Baghdad in the coming weeks. These will come from other areas of the country. Our military commanders tell me that this deployment will better reflect the current conditions on the ground in Iraq.

We also agreed that Iraqi security forces need better tools to do their job. And so we'll work with them to equip them with greater mobility, firepower, and protection.

We still face challenges in Baghdad, yet we see progress elsewhere in Iraq. Iraqi security forces are growing in strength and capability, and recently, a key Province in southern Iraq was transferred to full Iraqi civilian control. In the midst of all the violence in Baghdad, sometimes a success is obscured. And this transfer of a key Province is the beginning of other Provinces to be transferred to full Iraqi control. It's a sign of progress. No question, it's tough in Baghdad, and no question, it's tough in other parts of Iraq. But there are also

places where progress is being made, and the Prime Minister and I talked about that progress.

The Prime Minister and I agreed to establish a joint committee to achieve Iraqi self-reliance. This new partnership will seek to ensure the smoothest and most effective assumption of security responsibility by Iraqi forces. Prime Minister Maliki was very clear this morning: He said he does not want American troops to leave his country until his Government can protect the Iraqi people. And I assured him that America will not abandon the Iraqi people.

Tomorrow the Prime Minister and I will travel to Fort Belvoir in Virginia to visit with American troops and their families so we can thank them for their courage and their sacrifice. And we in the United States need to recognize the enormous sacrifice of the Iraqi people. The people are suffering hardships. These terrorists and killers are trying to shake the will of the Iraqi people. But despite large casualties, both civilian and military, the Iraqi people continue to stand for public office, enlist in their security forces, and, through their actions, demonstrate every day that they want to raise their families and live their lives like other free people around the world. And I'm impressed by the courage of the Iraqi citizens, Mr. Prime Minister.

Citizens continue to believe in the future of their country and to subscribe to the notion upon which America is also founded, that the freedom of their country is worth fighting for. America is proud to be allied with such people. And it's important the Iraqi people hear of our pride and our determination, Mr. Prime Minister.

We also discussed several new initiatives we're undertaking to create opportunity for the Iraqi people, and one of them is called the Iraqi Leaders Initiative. And starting

next summer, 200 high school and university students from all regions of Iraq and all sectors of Iraqi society will come to America to study at local institutions and build personal friendships with the people of our country. This is going to be the largest program of its kind, and it will help build the next generation of leaders for a free and democratic Iraq.

Prime Minister and I spent time talking about Lebanon, and we had a frank exchange on—of views on this situation. I listened closely to the Prime Minister, and I valued a chance to hear his perspective. I heard him on the seriousness of the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon and the need to do more for the Lebanese people. I told him that Secretary Rice has announced greater humanitarian measures for Lebanon to include \$30 million in aid. America is concerned about the women and children who suffer in that country, concerned about the loss of innocent life. I reminded him and told him that Condi is over there working to establish corridors to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and central relief supplies.

I told him I support a sustainable ceasefire that will bring about an end to violence. And I talked about the importance of strengthening the Lebanese Government and supporting the Lebanese people.

Prime Minister and I also discussed his proposal for an international compact for Iraq. The compact will outline Iraq's commitment to specific economic reforms and the international community's commitment to support those reforms. We expect the international compact will be signed later this year. And I told the Prime Minister that the United States will work to encourage other countries to support the compact and for other countries that have made

pledges to Iraq to make good on their pledges.

In light of the recent violence in the Middle East, some are questioning whether democracy can take root in the region. I believe that the Iraqi people are showing us their answer. They're making enormous sacrifices to secure their freedom, and they've elected leaders who are making tough decisions.

And, Mr. Prime Minister, you're such a leader, and I welcome you here to the White House. Thanks for coming.

Prime Minister Maliki. Thank you very much. In the name of God, the most merciful and the passionate, I would like to thank President George Bush. Mr. President, I would like to thank you for your invitation to come here and visit the United States of America, and I would like to thank you for the warm welcome that myself and my delegation received. And I also—I appreciate very much your interest in the situation in Iraq and the responsible spirit that has dominated our discussions today.

We have discussed with President Bush, clearly and frankly, all the current challenges and the horizon and the future and ways of cooperation between our two countries in order to build a democratic, united, flourishing Iraq that enjoys its full national sovereignty. We have agreed that building the security and military institutions in Iraq, in terms of numbers, equipment, firearms, and as quickly as possible, represents the fundamental base in order to stabilize the country and to have security and defeat terrorism.

I reaffirmed to the President Iraq's need to—the cooperation from the international community and your cooperation. And I have seen a great deal of understanding for this very vital issue from the President. I also expressed my appreciation to the role that's been played by the multinational forces and the exerted efforts to support us and to help us in building our security organizations, to allow our organizations to

fully be in control of the security position and the security circumstances.

I agreed with the President to form a joint committee of experts and the connections in order to achieve the self-sufficiency for the Iraqi forces. This will allow these forces to bear the responsibility of protecting security and confronting terrorism in our country. And in this field, we have achieved our first and initial success when our forces assumed the responsibility in the Muthanna Governorate. This is a very important step—will be followed by similar steps in many other governorates in Iraq.

We are determined to defeat terrorism. And the security plan for Baghdad have entered the second phase, and it's achieving its objectives in hunting the terrorist networks and eliminating it.

I have informed the President about the national reconciliation plan, which I have launched in order to attract more Iraqi forces which have not engaged in the political process yet. This initiative represents, in addition to building the Iraqi Armed Forces, one of the initiatives that will contribute to choking terrorism and defeating terrorism in Iraq.

On the economic sphere and the reconstruction of Iraq, I have seen support from President Bush to ensure the success of the international impact, which we hope that, through it, we'll be able to have the support of the world community in reconstructing Iraq and improving the services that the Government is providing to its own Iraqi people. We hope that many other countries will participate and contribute in that conference that will be convened in the next few months in order to sign this international compact. I assured the President, Iraq's readiness to make this conference a success and accept the mutual commitments between Iraq and those who will sign the compact. The President reaffirmed his administration's commitment to encourage as many countries as possible to support this compact.

I also discussed with the President the issue of Lebanon in all seriousness, in a way that matches the importance of the size of destructions that happened to the Lebanese people as a result of the military air and ground attacks. And I also emphasized the importance of immediate cease-fire, and call on the international community to support the Lebanese Government and support the Lebanese people to overcome the damage and destruction that happened.

I also expressed to the President about Iraq's desire and Iraq's political leadership's desire to merge in the international community and its institutions and to participate effectively in the various issues on the basis of mutual interest and to be committed to the policy of not interfering or intervening in the domestic policies of other countries. I also reaffirmed the importance of approaching every issue through peaceful and diplomatic means to deal with the problems that exist in our region. These chronic problems requires a great deal of wisdom and patience and perseverance in order to find the just and successful and fair solution.

Mr. President, I thank you once again for your kind invitation and for your very warm hospitality and generosity.

President Bush. —questions a side, starting with you, Tom [Tom Raum, Associated Press].

Security Situation in Baghdad

Q. Mr. President and Mr. Prime Minister, why should one expect this new security crackdown in Baghdad to succeed when all previous ones have failed?

And, Mr. President, you've said before that withdrawal of U.S. troops would depend on conditions on the ground. What do conditions on the ground now in Baghdad suggest in terms of whether there can be a significant withdrawal of American forces by the end of the year?

President Bush. I'll start—do you want to start? Go ahead.

Prime Minister Maliki. Actually, the circumstances that the Baghdad security plans, or other plans related to Basra and other places, are different in terms of circumstances from the previous plans. Today, Iraq has a national unity Government that—it is basically composed of—all elements of the Iraqi people are represented in this Government. Iraq has a parliament; it has a Constitution to face all these challenges. So what the Baghdad security plan gains, in terms of support, is support from all over the segments of the Iraqi population.

Secondly, by monitoring the reality on the ground, we will be able to ensure the success, especially what happens against the innocent people. The Baghdad security forces was able to eliminate many hotspots of crimes and troubles in Baghdad.

President Bush. One of the things that's important is for—and one of the reasons why you trust the commanders on the ground is because there needs to be flexibility. And I explained to the Prime Minister that I'll be making my decisions based upon the recommendations of General Casey. And obviously, the violence in Baghdad is still terrible, and therefore, there needs to be more troops. In other words, the commanders said, "What more can we do; how best to address the conditions on the ground?" And they have recommended, as a result of working with the Prime Minister, based upon his recommendation, that we increase the number of U.S. troops in Baghdad alongside of Iraqi troops. And we're going to do that.

The second request that the Prime Minister made was that he needs more equipment for his troops. And General Dempsey, along with General Casey, have reviewed his requests and his ideas. And I told the Prime Minister if this is what these generals recommend, it's what I support.

Conditions change inside a country, Tom. And the question is, are we going to be facile enough to change with—will we be nimble enough; will we be able to deal

with the circumstances on the ground? And the answer is, yes, we will.

Mr. Prime Minister, would you like to call on somebody? There you go.

Iraq-U.S. Cooperation in the War on Terror

Q. I have two questions—one, President Bush. The first one: Is there an obvious change that could be made to the security status, you politically—particularly in Baghdad right now?

And the second question for you, Mr. Prime Minister. You said in a press conference in Baghdad that your visit to Washington, you will put—you will cross the t's and dot the i's, especially regarding the security needs. Did you cross the t's and dot the i's in your discussion with President Bush?

President Bush. —a lot of time talking about security, and I can understand why. Because there's—there are people who are willing to destroy innocent life to achieve a political objective. And the Prime Minister is deeply concerned about the lives of his fellow citizens. And I appreciate that concern. I would be very worried if a Prime Minister came to talk about his country and did not mention, first and foremost, protecting people's lives. That's, after all, the most important responsibility of government.

And he believes, and I believe, that the—there needs to be more forces inside Baghdad who are willing to hold people to account. In other words, if you find somebody who's kidnaping and murdering, the murderer ought to be held to account. It ought to be clear in society that that kind of behavior is not tolerated.

And that's the attitude of the Prime Minister. My attitude is, we shouldn't try to gauge whether or not someone is justified or not; we ought to be saying that if you murder, you're responsible for your actions. And I think the Iraqi people appreciate that type of attitude.

And so we—so we're not only talking about adjusting a Baghdad plan at the Prime Minister's request to make it more effective—we're also talking about how to make the Iraqi Army more effective. But the truth of the matter is, the Iraqi Army is becoming a highly professional force that will help bring confidence to the people inside Iraq that the Government has got the capacity to protect them.

Prime Minister Maliki. Thank you, Mr. President. Actually, successful acts and large issues has to be based on a clear vision. And through the serious discussion and the clear and the frank conversation that I had with President George Bush, that we are truly crossing the t's and dotting the i's in terms of enhancing the security and supporting the reconstruction. Through the discussion, we were able to go through the details of the vision that will cover the future, because we are not talking here about a specific phase of the reconstruction, but we are facing the necessity of continuous work in order to make sure that the entire political experiment will succeed.

I believe with a great deal of confidence that I have reaffirmed through this, and I became convinced that—I have full confidence of victory, and we will be highly capable of defeating terrorism in Iraq.

Situation in the Middle East/Democracy in Iraq

Q. —you had a frank exchange on the Middle East. How can you get Arab nations to apply pressure to stop the fighting in the Middle East if allies like the Prime Minister won't condemn Hizballah?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, what exactly is your position on Hizballah? Thank you.

President Bush. The terrorists are afraid of democracies. And what you've witnessed in Israel, in my judgment, is the act of a terrorist organization trying to stop the advance of democracy in the region.

I assured the Prime Minister that I care deeply about the suffering that takes place,

that we understand the anguish of leaders in the region who see innocent people losing their life. I also assured him that Condi Rice's mission is to help get humanitarian aid to the Lebanese people. She's working on not only air corridors but sea corridors and land corridors to get aid to the people. And the United States will participate, as will other nations.

I also talked about making sure that we adhere to U.N. Resolution 1559, which basically—not basically—strongly urges political parties not to be armed. A key part of our strategy is to support democracy. And so not only do we support democracy in the Palestinian Territory, we also support the Lebanese democracy. I think the Prime Minister was pleased to hear my strong support for the Siniora Government.

And so Condi goes with the following messages: We support the Siniora Government; we care about the people; we will help to get aid to the people; and that we want a sustainable cease-fire. We don't want something that's short-term in duration. We want to address the root causes of the violence in the area, and therefore, our mission and our goal is to have a lasting peace, not a temporary peace but something that lasts.

And I believe that Iraq, in some ways, faces the same difficulty, and that is, a new democracy is emerging and there are people who are willing to use terrorist techniques to stop it. That's what the murder is all about. People fear democracy if your vision is based upon kind of a totalitarian view of the world. And that's the ultimate challenge facing Iraq and Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories, and that is, will the free world, and the neighborhood, work in concert to help develop sustainable democracy?

And Iraq took a long step along that—a big step on that path when they developed a Constitution that was ratified by the Iraqi people. And it's a modern Constitution, and it's a landmark moment in

the history of freedom advancing in the Middle East.

I believe that deep in everybody's soul, Mr. Prime Minister, is a desire to be free. And when 12 million Iraqis went to the polls and said, "I want to be free," it was an amazing moment. I know it seems like a long, long time ago that that happened. But it was a powerful statement about what is possible in terms of achieving peace.

Prime Minister Maliki. Thank you. Here, actually, we're talking about the suffering of a people in a country. And we are not in the process of reviewing one issue or another, or any government position. The important thing here is what we are trying to do is to stop the killing and the destruction, and then we leave the room and the way for the international and diplomatic efforts and international organization to play the role to be there.

We are not here facing a situation only in Lebanon, but would be facing a variety of issues in different countries. I'm talking here about the approach that should be used in order to stop this process of promoting hatred; that has to be superior decisions coming from above in order to protect these experiments, particularly the democratic experiments that should be protected by those who are trying to oppose it.

Israel-U.S. Relations/Rule of Law in Iraq

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister. General Abizaid said that the danger that Iraq is facing is the religious danger. Do you agree with his assessment? And do you see that—is there any security plan that can really curb the religious violence?

[*Inaudible*]*—humanitarian aid to Lebanon, yet there's also reports that your administration are speeding up delivery of laser-guided missiles to Israel and bunker-buster bombs. And do you see this—if this is true, do you see it as contradictory? On one hand, you allow Israel to kill people, and civilian, in particular, and on the other*

hand, you're trying to aid the very people that have been suffering and killed as a result?

President Bush. No, I don't see a contradiction in us honoring commitments we made prior to Hizballah attacks into Israeli territory. And I—like the Prime Minister, I'm concerned about loss of innocent life, and we will do everything we can to help move equipment—I mean, food and medicines to help the people who have been displaced and the people who suffer.

Prime Minister Maliki. Yes. I do not reduce the risk and the danger of the religious feelings, especially through some of the organizations that are trying to promote this hatred. And there are—some of the events are on the basis of religious divide, but I would like to assure the political, religious leaders, and civil societies that the Iraqi parties, politicians, religious leaders are rising to their responsibility and are condemning those who are cooperating with Al Qaida and those who are trying to start a civil war.

The one—the most important element in the security plan is to curb the religious violence, because we will not allow any Iraqis to use this background. This is one of the main objective of the security plan.

It is the policy of the Government: There is no killing or discrimination against anyone. Everything is by law and everything based on the Constitution and the law. The Government responsibility is to protect all Iraqis, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. It's important to say that we are shedding the light against those who are calling for sectarian religious, because we feel that this is a great danger to Iraq. And, God willing, there will be no civil war in Iraq.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:27 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Lt. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, commander, Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq and NATO Training Mission—Iraq; and Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon. A reporter referred to Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command. Prime Minister Maliki and some reporters spoke in Arabic, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement on Senate Passage of Legislation Concerning the Transportation of Minors Across State Lines

July 25, 2006

Transporting minors across State lines to bypass parental consent laws regarding abortion undermines State law and jeopardizes the lives of young women. To combat this dangerous practice, the Senate today passed the "Child Custody Protection Act," which penalizes those who unlawfully attempt to circumvent parental notification requirements.

I appreciate the Senate's efforts to preserve the integrity of State law and protect our Nation's families. I look forward to the House and Senate resolving their differences in conference and sending this legislation for my signature.

NOTE: The statement referred to S. 403.